CHAPTER SIX
Black Lives Matter: A Movement, Not a Moment

What happened to my daughter was unjust. It was unjust. It was really unjust. I've been through all the range of emotions that I can go through, concerning this. But I will not stop, as all of the rest of the mothers have said, until I get some answers.

—Cassandra Johnson, mother of Tanisha Anderson, killed by Cleveland police in 2014

Every movement needs a catalyst, an event that captures people's experiences and draws them out from their isolation into a collective force with the power to transform social conditions. Few could have predicted that white police officer Darren Wilson shooting Mike Brown would ignite a rebellion in a small, largely unknown Missouri suburb called Ferguson. For reasons that may never be clear, Brown's death was a breaking point for the African Americans of Ferguson—but also for hundreds of thousands of Black people across the United States. Perhaps it was the inhumanity of the police leaving Brown's body to fester in the hot summer sun for four and a half hours after killing him, keeping his parents away at gunpoint and with dogs. "We was treated like we wasn't parents, you know?" Mike Brown Sr., said. "That's what I didn't understand. They sicced dogs on us. They wouldn't let us identify his body. They pulled guns on us."[1] Maybe it was the military hardware the police brandished when protests against Brown's death arose. With tanks and machine guns and a never-ending supply of tear gas, rubber bullets, and swinging batons, the Ferguson police department declared war on Black residents and anyone who stood in solidarity with them.

Since then, hundreds more protests have erupted. As the United States celebrates various fiftieth anniversaries of the Black freedom

struggles of the 1960s, the truth about the racism and brutality of the police has broken through the veil of segregation that has shrouded it from public view. There have been periodic ruptures in the domestic quietude that is so often misinterpreted as the docility of American democracy: the brutal beating of Rodney King, the sodomy of Abner Louima, the execution of Amadou Diallo. These beatings and murders did not lead to a national movement, but they were not forgotten. As Ferguson protestor Zakiya Jemmott said, “My first protest was in 1999, when Amadou Diallo was murdered by police. I haven’t seen any changes and have not changed my perception of police officers.”[2]

It is impossible to answer, and perhaps futile to ask, the question “why Ferguson?” just as it’s impossible ever to accurately calculate when “enough is enough.” The transformation of Mike Brown’s murder from a police killing into a lynching certainly tipped the scales. Writer Charles Pierce captured what many felt: “Dictators leave bodies in the street. Petty local satraps leave bodies in the street. Warlords leave bodies in the street. Those are the places where they leave bodies in the street, as object lessons, or to make a point, or because there isn’t the money to take the bodies away and bury them, or because nobody gives a damn whether they are there or not.”[3] In the hours after Brown’s body was finally moved, residents erected a makeshift memorial of teddy bears and memorabilia on the spot where police had left his body. When the police arrived with a canine unit, one officer let a dog urinate on the memorial. Later, when Brown’s mother, Lesley McSpadden, laid out rose petals in the form of his initials, a police cruiser whizzed by, crushing the memorial and scattering the flowers.[4] The next evening, McSpadden and other friends and family went back to the memorial site and laid down a dozen roses. Again, a police cruiser came through and destroyed the flowers.[5] Later that night, the uprising began.

The police response to the uprising was intended to repress and punish the population, who had dared to defy their authority. It is difficult to interpret in any other way their injudicious use of tear gas, rubber bullets, and persistent threats of violence against an unarmed, civilian population. The Ferguson police, a 95 percent

white and male force, obscured their badges to hide their identities, wore wristbands proclaiming “I AM DARREN WILSON,” and pointed live weapons at unarmed civilians engaged in legal demonstrations. The municipality resembled a rogue state, creating arbitrary rules governing public protests and assaulting the media, as both an act of revenge and an attempt to hide the sheer brutality of its operation. In the twelve days following Brown’s death, 172 people were arrested, 132 of whom were charged only with “failure to disperse.” At one point during the demonstrations, a Ferguson officer pointed his AR-15 semiautomatic rifle in the direction of a group of journalists and screamed, “I’m going to fucking kill you!” When someone asked, “What’s your name, sir?” He screamed, “Go fuck yourself!”[6] For a moment, the brutal realities of Black life in Ferguson were exposed for all to see.

Black protestors went on to unmask the kleptocracy at the heart of municipal operations in Ferguson, revealing that the Ferguson police department, directed by the mayor and city council, were targeting the Black population as the major source of revenue for the town (see chapter 4). Black households were inundated with fines, fees, citations, tickets, and arrests to such an extent that the revenues were the town’s second leading source of revenue. Court fines deriving from motor-vehicle violations were 21 percent of revenue, accounting for “the equivalent of more than 81 percent of police salaries before overtime.”[7] Failure to pay or appear in court to respond to tickets instantly produced an arrest warrant. Emails between city administrators openly called for more. In March 2013, the finance director wrote to the city manager, “Court fees are anticipated to rise about 7.5%. I did ask the Chief if he thought the PD [police department] could deliver 10%. He indicated he could try.”[8] By December 2014, the department had 16,000 outstanding arrest warrants, mostly for minor offenses.[9] Ninety-five percent of traffic stops were directed at Black drivers. As the DOJ report said, “Ferguson law enforcement practices are directly shaped and perpetuated by racial bias.”[10] Black people in Ferguson were living under the near complete domination of the police.

Indeed, as the daily protests went on, the Ferguson police’s escalating brutality and lawlessness seemed to arise out of

frustration that they could not make the Black men and women of Ferguson submit. Quentin Baker, a nineteen-year-old from St. Louis, observed that "all of these things happen after the police provoke it. What they want to do is impose their will."[11] Just as residents rebuilt the memorials for Mike Brown within hours every time the police tried to destroy them, the same dynamic held for the protests. Every night the police used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the crowd; the next day, the crowds would reemerge. Ferguson activist Johnetta Elzie described how the protestors were changing even in the face of "unthinkable" police violence:

> I became less of a peaceful protester and more of an active one. Using my voice to chant loudly along with other protesters seemed to be enough but it wasn't. Instead, I decided to yell directly at the police. I decided to dare the police to look at the faces of the babies and children their dogs were so ready to chase down. As more people began to look directly at the police and yell their grievances, the more aggravated they became.[12]

Protestor Dontey Carter said, "I've been down here since the first day. . . . We all had the same pain and anger about this. We all came together that day. . . . They're killing us, and it's not right."[13]

Carter's words addressed the urgency of a summer that had turned into a killing season. Just weeks before Mike Brown was shot, the world had watched video of New York City cop Daniel Pantaleo choking the life out of Eric Garner. Four days before Brown was killed, the police struck in a suburb of Dayton, Ohio. John Crawford III, a twenty-two-year-old, unarmed African American man, was killed in the aisle of a Walmart while he talked on the phone with the mother of his children. Crawford had been holding a toy gun. Even though Ohio is an "open carry" state where citizens are allowed to carry unconcealed guns, local police opened fire on Crawford with little to no warning, killing him.[14] Two days after Brown's murder, police in Los Angeles shot unarmed Ezell Ford three times in the back as he lay face down on the sidewalk. The following day, elsewhere in California, Dante Parker, a thirty-six-year-old African American man, was detained by police and tasered multiple times before dying in police custody.[15] The Ferguson rebellion became a focal point for the growing anger in Black communities across the country.

For almost the entire fall, the Ferguson movement focused on winning an indictment of Darren Wilson. Prosecutors worked to drag out the grand jury proceedings as long as possible, believing that colder weather would edge the movement off the streets. Undoubtedly, given the level of repression, the intensity of the August protests was not sustainable over time. But when that level of intensity waned, the *persistence* of the protests kept the movement alive. Activists and others from around the country were also important in helping sustain the local movement. In late August 2014, Darnell Moore and Patrisse Cullors of #BlackLivesMatter organized a "freedom ride" to bring people from all around the country to the suburb in solidarity with the local movement. Moore described the breadth of the mobilization:

> More than 500 people traveled from across the United States and Canada to provide various forms of support to the activists on the ground in Ferguson. Those who traveled with us represented a new and diverse contingent of black activists. We weren't all the same age, nor did we share the same political viewpoints. We weren't all heterosexual or documented or free from past involvement with the criminal justice system. Some of us were transgender, disabled or bisexual.[16]

Local activists held vigils, picketed the Ferguson police department, and blocked traffic on Interstate 70, which runs through Ferguson, in a dogged effort to maintain pressure on local officials to indict Wilson. Continued police harassment was also critical to sustaining the movement. In late September, Mike Brown's memorial was doused with gasoline and ignited. The flames revitalized the protests: more than two hundred people gathered in an angry protest that saw five people arrested.[17]

When local officials began to speculate that the grand jury decision would be made public in October, local activism picked up. A multiracial protest erupted in the solidarity song "Which Side Are You On?" during a performance of the St. Louis Symphony. When the protestors marched out, chanting "Black lives matter," many in the audience—including symphony musicians—applauded. On October 8, an off-duty St. Louis police officer fired at Black teenager Vonderrit Myers seventeen times, hitting him with eight bullets and killing him. Days after Myers's death, two hundred students marched from Myers's neighborhood, called Shaw, to join hundreds more students in an occupation of St. Louis University (SLU). For several

days more than a thousand students occupied the campus, harkening back to the days of the Occupy movement.[18] The occupation of SLU coincided with Ferguson October, in which hundreds of people traveled to Ferguson—in solidarity with the local movement, but also to register their own protest. As protestor Richard Wallace from Chicago put it, “Everybody here is representing a family member or someone that’s been hurt, murdered, killed, arrested, deported.”[19] Ferguson officials continued to stall in announcing Wilson’s fate, but the resilience of the Ferguson movement was inspiring people far beyond the Midwest. Historian Donna Murch wrote,

> I have no words to express what is happening in Ferguson. In the name of Michael Brown, a beautiful black storm against state violence is brewing so dense it has created a gravity of its own, drawing in people from all over the U.S., from centers of wealth and privilege to this city whose most prosperous years were a century ago. It looks explicitly not only to St. Louis city and county police and other municipal law enforcement, but also to the imperial wars in the Middle East as sites of murder and trauma. The call repeated over and over is Stokely Carmichael’s: “Organize, Organize, Organize.” And this growing youth movement has all the ancestral sweetness of kinship. In the words of a local hip-hop artist/activist, “Our grandparents would be proud of us.”[20]

Changing of the Guard

A battle over the meaning of Ferguson between activists, civil rights leaders, elected officials, and federal agents was under way. For the activists and Black people of Ferguson, the point of the struggle was to win justice for Mike Brown, which meant keeping the protests alive. Winning an indictment against Wilson would vindicate their strategy and tactics, which often came into noisy conflict with establishment figures who made repeated calls for “calm” and often seemed more intent on criticizing the people in the streets than the conditions that compelled them to act in the first place.

The civil rights establishment, members of Congress, and federal agents were on hand for a variety of reasons. Members of the CBC appeared most concerned with increasing the voter rolls through registration campaigns and trying to transform the anger in the streets into a midterm-election turnout that would favor the Democratic Party. The civil rights establishment had overlapping and competing goals. The NAACP, whose reputation had been in

decline, was looking to rehabilitate its image by trying to lead and direct events in Ferguson. Jesse Jackson Sr., as a leading figure in civil rights lore, had been politically adrift and marginalized because he was not in the orbit of the Obama White House. He had been supplanted by the Reverend Al Sharpton as the new national face of the civil rights establishment. For years, families had called upon Sharpton to bring attention and resources to their children's murder by the police. Sharpton could and did provide both—and enhanced his reputation as a conduit into the Black community. He arrived in Ferguson shortly after Mike Brown's death. Barely a week after Sharpton's arrival came the DOJ, led by former attorney general Eric Holder. Sharpton and Holder worked in tandem to reestablish the legitimacy of "law and order" and of the federal government as a respectable arbiter in local situations that could not otherwise be resolved.

But by the time Sharpton arrived in Ferguson, it was too late. Young Black people had already endured two standoffs with police that had ended with tear gas and rubber bullets. People were furious. These bullying tactics had transformed the marches into much more than a struggle for Mike Brown. The battle in the Ferguson streets was also fueled by the deep grievances of the town's young people, whose future was being stolen by the never-ending cycle of fines, fees, warrants, and arrests. They were fighting for their right to be on the street and to be freed from the vice grip of the Ferguson police. They had experienced their own collective power and were drawing strength from outlasting the police. They were losing their fear. And they were not about to stand down or move aside to accommodate Sharpton's arrival as the spokesperson for a local movement already firmly in place.

The conflict was almost immediate. Sharpton convened a meeting the day he arrived. His first speech blamed protestors for the violence that had been the central theme of the mainstream media. He told the group, "I know you are angry. . . . I know this is outrageous. When I saw that picture [of Brown lifeless on the ground], it rose up in me in outrage. But we cannot be more outraged than his mom and dad. If they can hold their heads in dignity, then we can hold our heads up in dignity." He added, "To

become violent in Michael Brown's name is to betray the gentle giant that he was. Don't be a traitor to Michael Brown."[21]

Even though Sharpton had just arrived in town, he was describing Mike Brown's character and personality to his friends and peers. It was condescending and presumptuous. Sharpton's words also lent legitimacy to Ferguson officials' accounts, which blamed violence on protestors even as police blatantly violated their rights to assemble. But Sharpton's plan transcended events in Ferguson: if he could quell the fires of Ferguson, his political value would increase exponentially. This was an important case for the Obama administration, given the growing national focus on police brutality. Holder's presence in Ferguson confirmed this. When the protests continued despite Sharpton's arrival, he amplified his criticism of "violent" protestors by trying to draw a sharp line between them and "peaceful" demonstrators.

As Sharpton delivered the eulogy at Brown's funeral, he reserved his harshest words for the young Black protestors who had stood up to police violence and provocations. Brown's parents, he said,

> had to break their mourning to ask folks to stop looting and rioting. . . . You imagine they are heartbroken—their son taken, discarded and marginalized. And they have to stop mourning to get you to control your anger, like you are more angry than they are. . . . Blackness was never about being a gangster or a thug. Blackness was no matter how low we was pushed down, we rose up anyhow. . . . Blackness was never surrendering our pursuit of excellence. It was when it was against the law to go to some schools, we built black colleges. . . . We never gave up. . . . Now, in the 21st century, we get to where we got some positions of power. And you decide it ain't black no more to be successful. Now you want to be a nigger and call your woman a ho. You've lost where you've come from. We've got to clean up our community so we can clean up the United States of America.[22]

In one fell swoop, Sharpton not only condemned the young people of Ferguson but invoked stereotypes to do so. It confirmed a sense among the new activists that Sharpton and those like him were out of step. There was a lingering, if unspoken question: What gave Sharpton or Jackson or the NAACP or the Justice Department the authority to tell protestors how they should respond to the violence of the Ferguson police? What, really, did any of them know about the daily harassment local residents experienced? What had any of these officials ever done to stop police murder and brutality?

A New Civil Rights Movement?

The young people of Ferguson had great reverence and respect for the memory of the civil rights movement, but the reality is that its legacy meant little in their everyday lives. “I feel in my heart that they failed us,” Dontey Carter said of contemporary civil rights leaders. “They’re the reason things are like this now. They don’t represent us. That’s why we’re here for a new movement. And we have some warriors out here.”[23] When Jesse Jackson Sr. arrived in Ferguson, he was confronted by a local activist, who said, “When you going to stop selling us out, Jesse? We don’t *want* you here in St. Louis!”[24] Other activists did not go that far, but they did note that young Black people had been thrust into leadership on the ground in Ferguson because they were the ones under attack. Johnetta Elzie recognized that: “The youth leading this movement is important because it is our time. For so long the elders have told us our generation doesn’t fight for anything, or that we don’t care about what goes on in the world. We have proved them wrong.”[25]

This division between the “old guard” and the “new generation” grew deeper as the movement began to take form. During a “Ferguson October” forum, tensions threatened to boil over when the organizers asked representatives of the civil rights establishment who had not been on the streets or at any of the daily protests to discuss the state of the movement. As NAACP president Cornell William Brooks gave a speech, several young people in the audience stood and turned their backs. Hip-hop artist Tef Poe informed the gathering, “This ain’t your grandparents’ civil rights movement.” He described the real movement as being made up of the young men in the streets with bandanas and young women who were supposed to be in school but were on the front lines instead. He said to the NAACP and the others assembled on the stage, “Y’all did not show up. . . . Get off your ass and join us!”[26]

Part of Sharpton’s appeal for the political establishment has been his ability to keep protests narrowly fixed on the specifics of a given case, or at least on the narrow issue of “police accountability.” But the deepening conflict between the young activists and the establishment was exacerbated as Ferguson officials dragged out the decision of whether or not to indict Wilson. For the young people,

this meant escalating the pressure, while the “old guard” continued to counsel patience and allowing the process to play out. But there were other tensions. The young activists were beginning to politically generalize from the multiple cases of police brutality and develop a systemic analysis of policing. Many began to articulate a much broader critique that situated policing within a matrix of racism and inequality in the United States and beyond. Millennials United in Action activist Ashley Yates recognized that

> the youth knew something very early in that the older generation didn’t. We knew that the system had already failed even before they began to show their hand publicly. We knew that not only was the murder of Mike Brown unjustified, it was another example of how the systems in place made it acceptable to gun us down. We are the generation that was ignited by Trayvon Martin’s murder and placed our faith in a justice system that failed us in a very public and intentional manner.[27]

Elzie also observed, “Thanks to Twitter, I had been able to see photos of Gaza weeks before, and feel connected to the people there on an emotional level. I never thought the small county of Ferguson, this little part of Greater St. Louis, would become Gaza.”[28]

There was truth to the generational divide, as there often is when a new generation of activists emerges and is not weighed down by earlier defeats or habituated to a particular method of organizing or thinking. They bring new ideas, new perspectives, and often, new vitality to the patterns and rhythms of activism. In general, as the movement has developed, there has been an impulse by some activists to celebrate the youth and denigrate age and experience. Generational tensions do not mean that movements and organizing in general cannot be multigenerational. Civil rights icon Ella Baker was significantly older and more experienced than the young activists she worked alongside in forming the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), yet she commanded tremendous respect because of the respect she had for the young people she organized with. In a well-known essay that described some of her conceptions of organizing and leadership during the sit-in movement in 1960, she wrote

> [The] desire for supportive cooperation from adult leaders and the adult community was . . . tempered by apprehension that adults might try to “capture” the student movement. The students showed willingness to be met on the basis of equality, but were intolerant of anything that smacked of manipulation or domination. This inclination toward *group-centered leadership*, rather than toward a *leader-centered*

> *group pattern of organization*, was refreshing indeed to those of the older group who bear the scars of the battle, the frustrations and the disillusionment that come when the prophetic leader turns out to have heavy feet of clay.[29]

Despite the constant clamor of "generational divide" today, there is much fluidity between the youth and older African Americans, who are often the parents of the young people being killed by the police. Where the generational divide expressed itself most forcefully today is over the developing politics of the movement. The tactical and strategic flexibility of the youth activists flowed from a developing politics that could not be constrained by a narrow agenda of voter registration or a simple electoral strategy. In Ferguson, these emerging politics were embodied by the emergence of young Black women as a central organizing force.

Black Women Matter

Most murders of Black people at the hands of the state go unnoticed by the public and unreported by the mainstream media. The few cases—compared to the significantly larger number of people killed—that do come into the public spotlight often involve Black men or boys. This was certainly true in Ferguson and Baltimore. This is not entirely surprising since, when police shoot to kill, they are usually taking aim at African American men. But Black women who are partnered with, have children with, or parent Black men and boys also suffer the effects of violence against them. The erasure of this particular way that Black women experience police violence minimizes the depth and extent of the harm caused by the abusive policing state. Black men falling under the control of the criminal justice system has a deleterious impact on their families and neighborhoods. Ex-convict status increases rates of poverty and unemployment, and the formerly incarcerated are banned from access to federal programs intended to blunt the worst effects of poverty, including housing vouchers, student loans, and other forms of financial aid. These policies affect not only Black men but also Black women who have Black men in their lives.

Black women, however, are also the victims of the policing state, including police violence and imprisonment. While Trayvon Martin became a household name, most people are not familiar with the

case of Marissa Alexander, a Black woman who was a victim of domestic violence. After using a firearm to keep her abuser at bay, Alexander invoked Florida's "stand your ground" statute as a defense. Although George Zimmerman, who killed Martin, succeeded in using this defense, Alexander was sentenced to twenty years in prison. Even though Alexander would eventually be released from jail, the contrast was a stark reminder of the dual system of justice in the United States.

The police also kill Black women. The names of Rekia Boyd, Shelly Frey, Miriam Carey, and Alberta Spruill are less familiar than those of Mike Brown or Eric Garner, but their killings were motivated by the same dehumanizing factors. Police also view Black women's lives with suspicion and ultimately as less valuable, making their death and brutalization more likely, not less. It is hardly even newsworthy when Black women, including Black transwomen, are killed or violated by law enforcement—because they are generally seen as less feminine or vulnerable. Consider the case of Tulsa, Oklahoma, police officer Daniel Holtzclaw, who was convicted of raping thirteen Black women while on duty. Holtzclaw is believed to have targeted Black women because they were of "lower social status," meaning that they were less likely to be believed and fewer people would care.[30] Indeed, Holtzclaw's crimes barely made a ripple in the national news.

Even though Black women have always been susceptible to violence from the police and the criminal justice system, where organizing and struggle have emerged, they have, for the most part, had a male face. For cases that develop a national profile, a male lawyer or reverend or civil rights leader—such as Al Sharpton—is usually the most visible face. Of course, mothers and other women in the lives of the (typically male) victims are heard from, but the activism has been seen as male-led and organized—until Ferguson.

In fact, the media have been particularly cognizant of the "women of Ferguson" as central to turning "a string of protests into a movement, by seamlessly shifting between the roles of peace-keepers, disrupters, organizers and leaders."[31] Indeed, the women who played an indispensable role in keeping the Ferguson

movement together through the summer until the early winter were also aware of their role. As Brittney Ferrell points out,

> The media has left out that if it were not for Black women, there would be no movement. We have seriously carried this to where it is now, not to say there are no men out here doing their thing because there are. What I am saying is that women have been here since day one, we are willing to lay our lives on the line to keep up the good fight without the support from anyone or any organization, hence why we built our own.[32]

To ask why Black women have played such a central role in this movement is to assume that they have played a lesser role in other movements. It should go without saying that Black women have always played an integral role in the various iterations of the Black freedom struggle. Whether it was Ida B. Wells, who risked her life to expose the widespread use of lynching in the South, or the mothers of the wrongfully accused Scottsboro Boys, who toured the world to build the campaign to free their sons, Black women have been central to every significant campaign for Black rights and freedom. Black women, including Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Diane Nash, and countless and unknown others, were critical to the development of the civil rights movement, but that movement is still primarily known by its male leaders.

Today, though, the face of the Black Lives Matter movement is largely queer and female. How has this come to be? Female leadership may actually have been an outcome of the deeply racist policing Black men have experienced in Ferguson. According to the US Census Bureau, while there are 1,182 African American women between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-four living in Ferguson, there are only 577 African American men in this age group. More than 40 percent of Black men in both the 20–24 and 35–54 age groups in Ferguson are missing.[33]

It's not just Ferguson. Across the United States, 1.5 million Black men are "missing"—snatched from society by imprisonment or premature death. To put it starkly, "More than one out of every six Black men who today should be between 25 and 54 years old have disappeared from daily life."[34] This does not mean that, if the 40 percent of Black men missing from Ferguson were present, they would be playing the same role that women have played in building, organizing, and sustaining the movement, but it does provide a

concrete example of the impact of the hyperaggressive, revenue-generating approach to policing in Ferguson. It is more likely that these women have stepped into leadership roles because of the absolutely devastating impact of policing and police violence in Black people's lives in general. But whatever the reasons, their presence has contributed more than just gender balance.

The Black women leading the movement against police brutality have worked to expand our understanding of the broad impact of police violence in Black communities. Sometimes this is articulated through the straightforward demand that society as a whole recognize that the police victimize Black women. "The media is excluding the fact that the police brutality and harassment in our communities impacts the women just as much as the men," says Zakiya Jemmott, adding, "They're highlighting black male lives and pushing the black female lives lost to police violence to the side. I want for the media to understand that *all* black lives matter."[35] But Black women have also made a much more deliberate intervention to expose police brutality as part of a much larger system of oppression in the lives of all Black working-class and poor people. Charlene Carruthers of Black Youth Project 100 explains,

> It's important because we are really serious about creating freedom and justice for all black people, but all too often black women and girls, black LGBTQ folks, are left on the sidelines. And if we're going to be serious about liberation we have to include all black people. It's really that simple. And it's been my experience that issues of gender justice and LGBT justice have been either secondary or not recognized at all.[36]

The Black women who created the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter—Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tometi, and Alicia Garza—articulate most clearly the overlapping oppressions confronting Black people in the struggle to end police violence and win justice. In an essay that captures the expansive nature of Black oppression while arguing that the movement cannot be reduced only to police brutality. Alicia Garza writes,

> It is an acknowledgment Black poverty and genocide is state violence. It is an acknowledgment that 1 million Black people are locked in cages in this country—one half of all people in prisons or jails—is an act of state violence. It is an acknowledgment that Black women continue to bear the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families and that assault is an act of state violence. Black queer and trans folks bearing a unique burden in a hetero-patriarchal society that disposes of us like garbage and simultaneously fetishizes us and profits off of us

> is state violence; the fact that 500,000 Black people in the US are undocumented immigrants and relegated to the shadows is state violence; the fact that Black girls are used as negotiating chips during times of conflict and war is state violence; Black folks living with disabilities and different abilities bear the burden of state-sponsored Darwinian experiments that attempt to squeeze us into boxes of normality defined by White supremacy is state violence.[37]

The focus on "state violence" strategically pivots away from a conventional analysis that would reduce racism to the intentions and actions of the individuals involved. The declaration of "state violence" legitimizes the corollary demand for "state action." It demands more than the removal of a particular officer or the admonishment of a particular police department, but calls attention to the systemic forces that allow the individuals to act with impunity. Moreover, these organizers are "intersectional" in their approach to organizing—in other words, they start from the basic recognition that the oppression of African Americans is multidimensional and must be fought on different fronts. The analytic reach of these organizers is what really underlies the tension between the "new guard" and the "old guard." In some ways, it demonstrates that today's activists are grappling with questions similar to those Black radicals confronted in the Black Power era, questions bound up with the systemic nature of Black oppression in American capitalism and how that shapes the approach to organizing.

Placing police brutality into a wider web of inequality has largely been missing from the more narrowly crafted agendas of the liberal establishment organizations, like Sharpton's National Action Network (NAN), which have focused more on resolving the details of particular cases than on generalizing about the systemic nature of police violence. This has meant that mainstream civil rights organizations tend to focus on legalistic approaches to resolve police brutality, compared to activists who connect police oppression to other social crises in Black communities. Of course, that approach has not been fully supplanted; a significant focus of the Ferguson movement was voter registration and increasing the presence of African Americans in local governing bodies. But the movement in Ferguson has also validated those who embraced a much wider view by showing how the policing of African Americans is directly tied to the higher levels of poverty and unemployment in Black

communities through the web of fees and fines and arrest warrants trapping Black people in a never-ending cycle of debt. The gravity of the crisis confronting Black communities, often stemming from these harmful encounters with the police, legitimizes the need for a more encompassing analysis. It allows people to generalize from police violence to the ways that public funding for police comes at the expense of other public institutions, and creates the space to then ask why. Not only do the "new guard's" politics stand in sharp contrast to those of the "old guard" but so does their approach to organizing. Beyond being led by women, the new guard is decentralized and is largely organizing the movement through social media. This is very different from national organizations like the NAACP, NAN, or even Jackson's Operation PUSH, whose mostly male leaders make decisions with little input or direction from people on the ground. This strategy is not simply the product of male leadership, but of an older model that privileged leveraging connections and relationships within the establishment over street activism—or using street protests to gain leverage within the establishment. The newness of the Ferguson movement and the incipient movement against police violence have temporarily prevented that kind of political shortcut.

From Moment to Movement

On November 24, 2014, a grand jury in Ferguson decided not to indict Darren Wilson for the murder of Mike Brown. Angry protests ripped through the suburb in the dead of night when the decision was announced. Rows of riot police protected City Hall and the police department while the commercial section of Black Ferguson was allowed to burn. There was little surprise about the decision not to indict, but there was anger at the completion of a legal lynching. President Obama returned to the airwaves to counsel patience and respect for the law. He reminded his audience that "we are a nation built on the rule of law," a concept rendered hollow and meaningless by months of witnessing the lawlessness of the Ferguson police department.[38] Obama implored protestors to channel their concerns "constructively" and not "destructively," but the split screens of several networks showed the president's words were falling on deaf

ears as fires burned through the night in Ferguson. This was not, however, a revival of the previous August, when the fires were igniting a new movement against police brutality; these were the flames of resignation and exhaustion.

As happened so often in 2014, at the moment when it appeared that the momentum of activism had swung back in the other direction, there was a new death at the hands of the police, like kindling on a fire. Two days before the Wilson decision was announced, young Tamir Rice, only twelve, was shot and killed by police in a playground in Cleveland, Ohio. Rice had been playing with a toy gun. Police shot and killed the boy within two seconds of their arrival—so quickly that the police car had not even stopped. Nine days earlier, Tanisha Anderson, also of Cleveland, had been killed when an officer performed a "judo" move to take her to the ground and in the process slammed her head into the concrete.[39] Days later, a Staten Island grand jury returned a decision not to indict Daniel Pantaleo, the officer who choked Eric Garner to death. Where the Ferguson decision seemed like an endpoint to the months-long struggle for justice there, these deaths and the Garner decision opened up an entirely new chapter. The continuation of the protests, however, was fraught with the tensions of going from "moment to movement."[40]

Obama quickly organized a meeting of some of the more visible activists from Ferguson and around the country to discuss police violence. James Hayes from the Ohio Student Union was one of the participants. "We appreciate that the president wanted to meet with us, but now he must deliver with meaningful policy," Hayes reported. "We are calling on everyone who believes that Black lives matter to continue taking to the streets until we get real change for our communities."[41] That such a meeting ever convened was proof alone that this was no longer just about Ferguson. The nation's political establishment was concerned about containing the movement.

This was no ordinary meeting; it included the president and vice president of the United States as well as the attorney general. But just as they were attempting to get in front of the anger over Ferguson, two days later the decision not to indict Pantaleo produced even larger protests than those that had greeted the

Wilson decision. Tens of thousands of people across the United States clogged the streets in disgust, if not rage, over the refusal to punish another white police officer for the death of an unarmed Black man. In Garner's case, the evidence was incontrovertible. Hundreds of thousands of people had watched the video of him pleading for his life and repeating, eleven times, "I can't breathe" while Pantaleo squeezed the life out of his body. Yet the grand jury found no fault. In the aftermath of the Garner decision Obama shelved the talk about "a nation of laws" and announced the formation of a new task force charged with creating "specific recommendations about how we strengthen the relationship between law enforcement and communities of color and minority communities that feel that bias is taking place."[42]

Activists were not waiting. As waves of protests washed across the United States, the first national protests against police brutality were called for the following week: one in New York City and one in Washington, DC. The march in New York was organized on Facebook by activists, the Washington march by Sharpton's NAN. The emergence of the national movement was immediately confronted by the reemergence of the political tensions that had surfaced in Ferguson. Sharpton had intended to stage-manage the entire affair, featuring himself as keynote speaker. Activists from Ferguson had traveled to Washington, but were dismayed to see the stage filled with people who had no organic connection to the movement. In fact, security guards were demanding VIP badges to gain access to the stage, where the opening rally of the march would commence. Johnetta Elzie was infuriated: "When we first got there, two people from NAN told us that we needed a VIP pass or a press pass to sit on the ledge," she said. "If it is a protest, why do you need to have a VIP pass?"[43] When Sharpton finally made his way to the stage, he ripped the Ferguson activists, who were demanding to address the crowd, as "provocateurs." The breach between Sharpton and the Ferguson-hardened activists was not simply about stage passes or other perceived slights, however. One young organizer named Charles Wade observed, "I think part of it is people just don't connect with his leadership. . . . We've been excluded by the traditional groups, so we've started our own thing."[44] Both marches

were wildly successful, bringing tens of thousands of people onto the streets and giving the movement its first profile as a national phenomenon, but the different paths forward were becoming clearer.

Days after the march, Sharpton wrote an article that revealed as much about the tremendous pressure he was under as it did his extremely vague view of how the movement would "reform [the] system":

> 10 or 25 years from now, it won't matter who got the most publicity or the most applause at a rally. . . . Let us not give in to pettiness and emotion, for true change is at our doorstep. You could see on the faces of those marching and chanting on Saturday, and you can see it in Washington as our elected officials are taking steps to reform a system that has failed far too many for too long. . . . You can literally feel it in the air—permanent change is on the horizon. Now we must seize it, and this moment, as we record history together.[45]

It was a far cry from his arrogant saunter into Ferguson. But Sharpton's mentions of "publicity" and "applause" showed that these were things that were on his mind. His vision of "big change" did not look like much: the two "major" reforms he named were body cameras for police and independent prosecutors to investigate police misconduct.

The smallness of his demands perfectly distilled the difference between the "old guard" and the growing youth rebellion. He made no mention of racism, mass incarceration, or any of the broader issues for which younger activists were arguing much more aggressively. Jesse Jackson also weighed in on this question: "To go from protesting to power, you need demonstrations, legislation and litigation. . . . Sprinters burn out real fast. These young people need to be in it for the long run. And it must be an intergenerational coalition. A movement that's mature requires clergy and lawyers and legislators. The struggle is never a one-string guitar."[46] Jackson was certainly less offensive than Sharpton, but his comments reflected a different conception of what the movement should focus on and look like. Moreover, it perpetuated the assumption that the new organizers were against "old people," which has never been demonstrated to be true. As Alicia Garza clarified in an interview, "We learned by making mistakes and from our elders who are brave enough to share with us all that they've learned. I think it's about having courageous conversations about the world we want to build

and how we think we can get there, and calling people out when we see things that are problematic."[47] Jackson's coalition of "clergy, lawyers and litigators" has failed miserably over the last forty years. Counseling the youth to pick up the tools of a failed strategy only served to reinforce the perception that the old guard was out of touch and out of its element. Sharpton's frustration at the questioning of his leadership and his role as the conduit to Black America eventually boiled over. Weeks after the December marches, Sharpton compared the "new guard" to "pimps" and to the people following them as "hoes." He went on:

> And while they got y'all arguing about old or young in Ferguson, they running an election and y'all ain't got a candidate in the race. Cause you're busy arguing with your mommy and daddy when they re-electing a mayor, and re-electing a prosecutor. They got you arguing about who going to lead a march—the old or the young—when they cutting up the city budget. You can't be that stupid! . . . It's the disconnect that is the strategy to break the movement. And they play on your ego. "Oh, you young and hip, you're full of fire. You're the new face." All the stuff that they know will titillate your ears. That's what a pimp says to a ho.[48]

Sharpton's stunning rant confirmed all of the concerns about his continuing role as the self-anointed leader of Black America.

In the days after the big December protests, Ferguson Action, the central body of the various activist formations located in and inspired by Ferguson, released a statement that included some of the activists who had been barred from speaking in Washington. It was titled "About This Movement" and, in its breadth and optimism, it made Sharpton's tantrum seem even pettier:

> This is a movement of and for ALL Black lives—women, men, transgender and queer. We are made up of both youth AND elders aligned through the possibilities that new tactics and fresh strategies offer our movement. Some of us are new to this work, but many of us have been organizing for years. We came together in Mike Brown's name, but our roots are also in the flooded streets of New Orleans and the bloodied BART stations of Oakland. We are connected online and in the streets. We are decentralized, but coordinated. Most importantly, we are organized. Yet we are likely not respectable negroes. We stand beside each other, not in front of one another. We do not cast any one of ours to the side in order to gain proximity to perceived power. Because this is the only way we will win. We can't breathe. And we won't stop until Freedom.[49]

Black Lives Matter

In December and January, "Black Lives Matter" was the rallying cry from every corner. A week after the Garner decision, several

hundred congressional aides, most of them Black, walked off the job in protest.[50] Black professional athletes wore T-shirts adorned with the slogan “I Can’t Breathe.” Soon after, high school and college students began wearing the shirts as well. Thousands of college, high school, and even middle school students began organizing and participating in die-ins, walkouts, marches, and other forms of public protest.[51] At Princeton University, more than four hundred students and faculty participated in a die-in. The protest included mostly African American students, but a number of white, Latino/a, and Asian students participated in the direct action. Students at Stanford blocked the San Mateo Bridge across San Francisco Bay. Students at seventy medical schools organized die-ins under the slogan “White Coats for Black Lives.”[52] Public defenders and other lawyers organized their own actions, including die-ins.[53] Protests were sweeping the nation and politicians raced to keep up. Presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton, who had never publicly mentioned Mike Brown’s name, was forced to say “Black Lives Matter” when she spoke in New York three days after the march.[54]

Even Obama began to change his tune. When talking about young African Americans, he was speaking less about morality and “instead focused on African American concerns about unfair treatment and called them part of the American family—which makes it awfully hard to single them out as the problem child in need of some tough love.”[55] Garza of #BlackLivesMatter spoke to the significance of the actions: “What’s happening right now is that a movement is growing. We are building relationships and connections, exercising new forms of leadership, new tactics, and learning lessons from our elders—people like Bayard Rustin, Diane Nash, Linda Burnham, Assata Shakur and Angela Davis—who have been part of social movements before us.”[56]

With the momentum clearly on the side of the movement, its leaders now had to articulate a way forward. Sharpton and the establishment had provided a convenient foil against which to contrast their politics, strategies, and tactics. It was easy to focus on the differences, but how did the new organizers, like those who penned the Ferguson Action document, envision the movement forging ahead? In the aftermath of Sharpton’s meltdown and with

“Black Lives Matter” absorbed into the daily banter of African Americans, they now had the country’s attention. The sharp contrast between the intersectional, grassroots organizing of the “new guard” and the top-down control of the civil rights establishment had helped to obscure important differences that existed *among* the new organizers. For example, some embraced building organizations like Black Youth Project 100 (BYP 100), #BLM, Dream Defenders, Million Hoodies, and Hands Up United, while others saw little need for that, instead embracing social media as the best way to organize the movement. Two of the most high-profile and influential activists in the movement, Johnetta Elzie and DeRay McKesson, were less committed to building an organization.

Ferguson Action’s statement echoed this sentiment when it described the movement as “coordinated” and “organized” but “decentralized.” In some sense, the futility of organization had been confirmed by their wild success in organizing protests and demonstrations on the fly. For months, Twitter and other social media platforms *were* successful in organizing large and influential protests. The December 13 march in New York City was organized by two relatively novice activists on Facebook; within hours thousands of people had “liked” it and committed to attending. Upward of fifty thousand people actually showed up for the rally. But how would the movement go from direct action, die-ins, highway closures, and walkouts to ending police brutality without dedicated spaces to meet, strategize, and engage in democratic decision-making? Considering the demands and “vision” that Ferguson Action put forward, everything from ending racial profiling to full employment and ending mass incarceration, it is impossible to imagine any of this happening only online.

These debates over organization resemble some of the hostility to organization that emerged in the Occupy movement from 2011. In both cases, the absence of formal structures and formal leadership was described as “giving everyone a voice.” If there is no organization, then no one can take over control. DeRay McKesson acknowledged this when he said, “But what is different about Ferguson . . . what makes that really important, unlike previous struggle, is that—who is the spokesperson? The people. The people,

in a very democratic way, became the voice of the struggle."[57] McKesson is one of the most visible actors in the movement and his insights are influential. He elaborates:

> It is not that we're anti-organization. There are structures that have formed as a result of protest, that are really powerful. It is just that you did not need those structures to begin protest. *You* are enough to start a movement. Individual people can come together around things that they know are unjust. And they can spark change. Your body can be part of the protest; you don't need a VIP pass to protest. And Twitter allowed that to happen. . . . I think that what we are doing is building a radical new community in struggle that did not exist before. Twitter has enabled us to create community. I think the phase we're in is a community-building phase. Yes, we need to address policy, yes, we need to address elections; we need to do all those things. But on the heels of building a strong community.[58]

Protests *are* for everyone—but how do you determine if the protest was successful or not, and how do you draw those who showed up deeper into organizing? Basically, how do you move from protest to movement? Historian Barbara Ransby speaks to this difficulty: "While some forms of resistance might be reflexive and simple—that is, when pushed too hard, most of us push back, even if we don't have a plan or a hope of winning—organizing a movement is different. It is not organic, instinctive, or ever easy. If we think we can all 'get free' through individual or uncoordinated small-group resistance, we are kidding ourselves."[59]

Not everyone rejects the need for organization. The fight against police terror has produced many new organizations and networks. At a forum at the historic Riverside Church in New York City, Asha Rosa of the Black Youth Project 100 spoke passionately on the need to be not only radical but also organized:

> Organizations are longer lasting than an action, longer lasting than a campaign, longer lasting than a moment. Organizations are where we can build structures that reflect our values, and build communities that help us sustain ourselves in this work and sustain the work itself. We saw 60,000 people in the streets in New York City [for the December protest]. . . . I won't be surprised if we don't see 60,000 people in the streets again until it's warm, and that's okay. . . . There are phases in these movements. We have to sustain that and make sure there are organizations for people to get plugged into.[60]

From the BYP 100, Dream Defenders, Hands Up United, Ferguson Action, and Millennials United to perhaps the most well known of the new organizations, #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM), this new era has produced an important cohort of activist organizations. Thus far,

#BLM has become the largest and most visible group, with at least twenty-six chapters. #BLM describes itself as “a decentralized network aiming to build the leadership and power of black people.” Patrisse Cullors describes its members as working “within the communities where they live and work. They determine their goals and the strategies that they believe will work best to help them achieve their goals. . . . We are deliberately taking a cautious and collaborative approach at developing a national Black Lives Matter strategy because it takes time to listen, learn and build.”[61] #BLM has reinvigorated the Occupy method of protest, which believes decentralized and “leaderless” actions are more democratic, essentially allowing its followers to act on what they want to do without the restraint of others weighing in. But at a time when many people are trying to find an entry point into anti-police activism and desire to be involved, this particular method of organizing can be difficult to penetrate. In some ways, this decentralized organizing can actually narrow opportunities for the democratic involvement of many in favor of the tightly knit workings of those already in the know.

These are issues #BLM will have to resolve, but as the largest and most influential organization in the movement, its example is critical and has wider implications. Organizational autonomy and decentralization raise questions of how actions will be coordinated and the concentrated weight of the entire movement brought to bear on targeted institutions. Different locations have different issues: how are local actions woven into a coherent social movement, not just a series of disparate demonstrations with no relationship to each other? If every city, organization, and individual does whatever it/she/he feels empowered to do in the name of the movement, how will we ever transform a series of effective local actions into a national movement? There have been situations where multiple groups have been able to coordinate: the #SayHerName campaign to highlight the effects of police violence on Black women stands out as a prime example. But the larger the movement grows, the more need there will be for coordination.

The Revolution Will Not Be Funded

If the success of the movement can be judged by the greater awareness it has created across the United States of police violence and brutality, it can also be measured by the amount of financial support some movement organizations have commanded. Some organizations involved in movement organizing have nonprofit status, while others do not but are still able to generate funding from influential foundations and wealthy individuals. The Black Lives Matter movement more generally has captured the attention of the nonprofit funding and philanthropy galaxy. This includes the Soros and Ford Foundations, but also Resource Generation, described as an "organization of wealthy people under 35 who support progressive movements."[62] In fact, there are philanthropic networks that exist for the sake of pressuring other foundations into donating resources to various social-justice movements. When the organizations connected to the Black Lives Matter movement were convening for a summer conference, the National Committee for Responsible Philanthropy made an appeal to other funders: "A profound transformation of the social, economic and political fabric that for decades has marginalized our Black communities is possible. The Movement for Black Lives convening will be a major step in that transformation. Any foundation that is committed to achieving real equity and contributing to the dismantling of racism has an opportunity and a responsibility to participate."[63] The appeal went on to thank "funders like the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, the Levi Strauss Foundation, the Barr Foundation" for making "investing in leadership development a priority."

These facts alone do not cast aspersions on the many organizations that receive these funds. Virtually all of the leading organizations of the civil rights movement received foundation funding, including SNCC, CORE, and SCLC. The Highlander Folk School—where many civil rights activists, including Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr., were trained in civil disobedience and other protest techniques—received much of its funding from the Field Foundation. Social justice organizations rely on any number of sources to finance their important work. But while activists may only be in search of precious dollars to continue organizing, it's doubtful that multibillion-dollar foundations are donating for purely altruistic

reasons. Indeed, historian Aldon Morris recounts funders' dubious collusion with agents of the state in a collective effort to undermine civil rights organizing:

> SNCC's financial situation improved in the summer of 1962, when it received some funds from the Taconic Foundation, the Field Foundation, and the Stern Family Fund. Those foundations worked in close conjunction with the Kennedy Administration and shared the Administration's view that black activists should channel their energies aimed at acquiring the vote for Southern blacks. . . . Following the tumultuous Freedom Rides, the Kennedy Administration made overt attempts to funnel the efforts of all the civil rights organizations into voter registration activities rather than disruptive protest movements. Indeed, the Kennedy Administration was adamant in opposing wide-scale civil disobedience.[64]

Morris goes on to quote James Farmer, a leader of SNCC, on how "the Kennedy administration attempted to 'cool out' the demonstrations": "Bobby Kennedy called a meeting of CORE and SNCC, in his office . . . and he said, 'Why don't you guys cut out all that shit, freedom riding and sitting-in shit, and concentrate on voter education . . . if you do that I'll get you a tax exemption.'"[65] Organizations that depend on outside funding can face problems if their funders develop political critiques of their work. "The nonprofit system is set up for foundations to have an inordinate amount of power and control over what grassroots organizations do," cautions Umi Selah, executive director of Dream Defenders. A former employee of a major funder for progressive Black causes also points out that many donations come "with a set of rules typically about how a funder wants to see things on the ground."[66]

Some groups have taken to collecting dues from their members and taking donations from the general public as way to offset dependence on outside funders. It is very early to understand fully the role that funders and the "nonprofit-industrial complex" will have on this movement, but they are certainly a factor, one that makes fully independent movement groups all the more necessary.[67] For example, the Ford Foundation seeks to play an important role in funding movement organizations, but despite its espoused intentions, it has played a historic role in subverting movements inside and outside the United States. Arundhati Roy writes of its deleterious impact in India in her book *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*:

> The Ford Foundation has a very clear, well-defined ideology and works extremely closely with the US State Department. Its project of deepening democracy and "good

> governance" is very much a part of the Bretton Woods scheme of standardizing business practice and promoting efficiency in the free market. . . . It is through this lens that we need to view the work that the Ford Foundation is doing with the millions of dollars it has invested in India—its funding of artists, filmmakers and activists, its generous endowment of university courses and scholarships.[68]

Perhaps the largest issue with the foundations and funders is that these organizations also attempt to politically shape the direction of the organizations they fund. The Ford Foundation, like many other funders, offers grants, but also produces "white papers," seminars, and conferences where it puts forward political perspectives and strategies aimed at directing the organizations it is funding.

Political scientist Megan Francis, describing the relationship between the NAACP and the American Fund for Public Service, also known as the Garland Fund, suggests that not only did the Garland Fund provide enormous financial resources to the NAACP in the 1950s, it also used its influence to redirect the NAACP's organizing focus:

> So why did the NAACP move from a racial-violence focused agenda to one that centered on education? In one word: money. The Garland Fund had so much sway over the NAACP's agenda because the Garland Fund had so much to offer the cash-strapped NAACP. In the negotiation of a grant, it quickly became apparent that the NAACP's black leadership favored a civil rights program with an explicit focus on racial violence. . . . Faced with the possibility of losing a critical funding source, the NAACP begrudgingly complied with the Garland Fund's requests. In the coming years, the NAACP relegated issues of racial violence to the margins and adopted a focus on education, for which it was known for the rest of the 20th century.[69]

Ultimately, funders and other philanthropic organizations help to narrow the scope of organizing to changing "policy" and other measures within the existing system.

Foundation money also "professionalizes" movements in a way that promotes careerism and the expectation that activism will be externally funded. In fact, most activism is volunteer-based, with fundraising a collective effort of the participants, not the particular expertise of grant writers. The important work of many grassroots organizations in the movement has been obscured by more financially stable organizations. Much smaller, local committees have sprung up around particular cases or to make specific demands that are tied to local situations in cities across the country.

For example, in Madison, Wisconsin, the group Young, Gifted and Black has been organizing for justice for Tony Robinson, a young Black man killed by the police in the spring of 2015. In Cleveland, community activists, including clergy, academics, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations, have come together to demand the arrest of the two officers who killed Tamir Rice.[70] In Chicago, a newly formed organization called We Charge Genocide traveled to Geneva, Switzerland, to call on international officials to compel the American government to stop police murder and brutality against African Americans. In Philadelphia, through the winter of 2014 and much of 2015, a citywide group called the Philly Coalition for REAL Justice brought together as many as sixty people twice a week to organize against police brutality. The coalition has organized thousands of people over the last year.[71] In Dallas, Texas, Mothers Against Police Brutality has not only helped to organize the important fight against police brutality but has actively tried to organize solidarity between the anti-police-brutality movement and the immigrant-rights movement. In the days before a May Day rally, marchers from both movements converged holding signs proclaiming “Black Lives Matter” and chanting “Down, down deportation; up, up immigration!”[72] These types of organizing efforts, often viewed by funders as “unprofessional,” exist around the country and are an entry point for ordinary people who want to be involved in movements.

The Demands: This Is What We Want

The absence of an independent movement organization has meant that the actual demands of the movement have been muddled. Some of this arises from the difficulty of the task itself. Police violence is a part of the DNA of the United States. As I have argued earlier, there has been no golden age of policing in which violence and racism were not central to the job. But that does not mean that nothing can be done to rein in the policing state. The Ferguson Action website has compiled the most comprehensive list of movement demands, including demilitarizing the police, passing anti-racial-profiling legislation, and collecting data documenting police abuse, among other measures.[73] Hands Up United, based in

Ferguson and St. Louis, has called for the “immediate suspension without pay of law enforcement officers that have used or approved excessive use of force.”[74] #BLM has called on the attorney general to release the names of police who have killed Black people over the last five years “so they can be brought to justice—if they haven’t already.”[75]

The demands of different organizations in the movement overlap, but what is the mechanism for acting on these demands when they are disconnected from any structure coordinated through the movement? How can we pay systematic attention to the progress made in achieving these demands or determining whether or not the demands have to be recalibrated? Connecting police violence to the vast effects of institutional racism is a strength of the current movement, but there is also a danger of submerging reforms that are attainable now into a much broader struggle to transform the very nature of American society. In other words, fighting around the demand to be “free” does not clarify the steps it will take to achieve that goal.

Demanding everything is as ineffective as demanding nothing, because it obscures what that struggle looks like on a daily basis. It can also be demoralizing, because when the goal is everything, it is impossible to measure the small but important steps forward that are the wellspring of any movement. This is not an argument for thinking small or abandoning the struggle to completely transform the United States; it is an argument for drawing a distinction between the struggle for reforms that are possible today and the struggle for revolution, which is a longer-term project. To be sure, there is definitely a relationship between the two. The struggle to reform various aspects of our existing society makes people’s lives better in the here and now; it also teaches people how to struggle and organize. Those are the building blocks that can lead to larger and more transformative struggles. In the process, people in the movement develop politically, gain experience and expertise, and become leaders. It is impossible to conceive of leaping from inactivity to changing the world in a single bound.

For example, many Black people in the South who were radicalized in the 1950s in the struggle against Jim Crow would

probably not have recognized themselves ten years later. Many people whose politics began with narrow demands to end Jim Crow eventually concluded that a government invested in racism could never achieve justice for Black people. Consider the experiences of the activists who made up SNCC, who in 1964 arrived at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City with the hope of seating Black delegates from their Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party as the delegation from Mississippi. The point was to expose and embarrass the national party for allowing the all-white Democratic Party to seat its delegation, knowing full well that Black people in Mississippi were violently disenfranchised. The SNCC activists believed if they were successful, they could break the grip of the Dixiecrats—the white Democratic Party of the South—on the electoral process throughout the South. But there was no way that Lyndon Johnson and the national Democratic Party were going to risk Southern white votes by acquiescing to the demands of civil rights activists. In the end, Johnson forced a deal down the activists' throats that left the convention and the white supremacist wing of the Democratic Party basically intact. James Forman, the executive director of SNCC, spelled out the meaning of the defeat:

> Atlantic City was a powerful lesson. . . . No longer was there any hope . . . that the federal government would change the situation in the Deep South. The fine line of contradiction between the state governments and the federal government, which we had used to build a movement, was played out. Now the kernel of opposites—the people against both the federal and state governments was apparent.[76]

Narrowing the demands of the movement in order to retain focus does not mean narrowing its reach. The brilliance of the slogan "Black Lives Matter" is its ability to articulate the dehumanizing aspects of anti-Black racism in the United States. The long-term strength of the movement will depend on its ability to reach large numbers of people by connecting the issue of police violence to the other ways that Black people are oppressed.

This process is already under way, as "new guard" activists have worked to make those connections. The best example of this involves the struggle of low-wage workers to raise the minimum wage to $15 an hour. Twenty percent of fast-food workers are Black and 68 percent of them earn between $7.26 and $10.09 an hour.[77] In Chicago, fast-food restaurants employ 46 percent of Black workers—

in New York it's 50 percent.[78] Twenty percent of Walmart's 1.4 million workers are African American, making it the largest employer of Black Americans. There is a logical connection between the low-wage workers' campaigns and the Black Lives Matter movement. The overrepresentation of African Americans in the ranks of the poor and working class has made them targets of police, who prey on those with low incomes. Black and Latino/a workers are also more likely to suffer the consequences of the mounting fees and fines discussed in chapter 4. Mwende Katwiwa of the BYP 100 in New Orleans explains the relationship between economic and racial justice:

> Too often Black youth are trapped in a singular narrative about their lived experience that does not address the structural and social conditions. . . . The #BlackLivesMatter movement goes beyond a call to end police brutality and murder against Black people—it is a recognition that Black life is valuable while it is still being lived. Valuing Black life means Black people should have access to their basic human dignity at their workplace—especially Black youth who are disproportionately impacted by unemployment and are over-represented in low-wage jobs.[79]

The movement today is in a much better position to nurture and develop a relationship with the growing low-wage-worker struggle than has been possible with the civil rights establishment. For years, Walmart and McDonald's have been reliable contributors to the CBC, NAACP, and NAN.[80] At Al Sharpton's sixtieth birthday bash, held at the Four Seasons hotel in New York, corporations were encouraged to make donations to the NAACP at various levels. The phone company AT&T pledged at the "activists level" with a full-page ad in the party program, while Walmart and GE Asset Management only pledged at the "preacher level," with half-page ads. McDonald's and Verizon pledged at the "track suit" level with a back page ad. Sharpton would not say how much each level was worth, but he did say that NAN reached its goal of raising $1 million and that "we have no new liens. . . . We'll be operating in the black this year. The biggest debts have already settled, and the party . . . was the second big fund-raiser."[81] Is it any wonder Sharpton and the others have been so quiet about the fight to raise the minimum wage to $15?

The fight for educational justice in Black communities has also gained momentum in the last several years and could be another entry point for collaboration between movements. The education

justice movement has focused on three issues that disproportionately affect Black students: efforts to privatize publicly funded schools, the school-to-prison pipeline, and high-stakes testing in public schools. There is a clear relationship between privatization and “zero-tolerance policies” that cause Black children to encounter law enforcement. Privately run but publicly financed charter schools have embraced “no excuses” discipline, in which “teachers rigorously enforce an intricate set of behavioral expectations on students. Minor infractions—a hand improperly raised, a shirt untucked, eyes averted—invite escalating punitive measures: demerits, lost privileges, detention, suspension. The policing theory that gave us stop-and-frisk now underpins the disciplinary system of the education reform movement.”[82]

Zero-tolerance policies embedded in “no excuses” discipline have rapidly increased the use of suspension and expulsions as the primary disciplinary tool in public and charter schools. The rate of suspension has increased for Black students, from 6 percent in the 1970s to 15 percent today. Removal from school is only one aspect of this; as the impulse toward suspension has increased so has the presence of police in the halls of schools. Greater police presence has resulted in the criminalization of childhood antics that in an earlier era were handled in the principal’s office. Black students bear the brunt of the punitive turn in public education. When hundreds of Seattle high school students walked out in reaction to the failure to indict Darren Wilson in Ferguson, teacher Jesse Hagopian drew a connection between Black Lives Matter and public education: “These students were surely animated by the injustice in Ferguson, but . . . they have no need to travel across the country to confront the ferocity of racism. The Seattle Public Schools are under investigation by the federal Department of Education for suspension rates for black students four times higher than white students for the same infractions.”[83] Just as corporate money mutes the participation of civil rights organizations in the struggle to raise the minimum wage, it has the same effect on their participation in the fight against corporate education reform and privatization. The NAACP and the Urban League have received *millions* of dollars from the Gates Foundation alone[84]—the project of billionaire Bill Gates to transform education

by championing charter schools—which has actually become a cover for attacking teacher unions and pushing standardized testing.

In both of these cases the Black Lives Matter movement has the potential to make deeper connections to and create relationships with organized labor. Black workers continue to be unionized at higher rates than white workers. The reason is simple: Black union workers make far above and beyond what nonunion Black workers make, in salary and benefits. Black workers also tend to be concentrated in the sectors most under attack by the state—federal, state, and local government, including education and other municipal jobs. Throughout the winter of 2015, Black Lives Matter activists all over the country organized actions to "shut it down," including highways, public transportation, shopping establishments—even brunch! Developing alliances with organized labor could lead to workers exercising their power to shut down production, services, and business as usual as pressure for concrete reforms concerning the policing state. The pathway for this has already been trodden. On May 1, 2015, tens of thousands of activists rallied across the country under the banner of Black Lives Matter—and in Oakland, California, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, Local 10, conducted a work stoppage that halted the flow of millions of dollars' worth of goods and prevented them from being loaded onto cargo ships. This was the first time a major union had initiated a work stoppage in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. The coalition that helped to organize the action said in a statement:

> Labor is one sector of the community that can truly shut this country down. If workers refuse to work, product doesn't get made, and money doesn't exchange hands. The only way this country is going to take us seriously is if we interrupt their commerce and impact their bottom line. Simply appealing to their humanity doesn't work. If that was the case, the epidemic of Black genocide at the hands of police would have ended decades ago.[85]

Broadening the reach of the movement also belies the notion that the movement is divided between old and young. Collaborating with Black workers, including Black teachers and other trade unionists, cuts across age groups and demonstrates that working-class African Americans of all generations have a vested interest in the success of the movement.

Solidarity

One important frontier of the movement also involves its capacity to develop solidarity with other oppressed groups of people. African Americans have always felt the most punishing aspects of life under American capitalism acutely. This has not meant, however, that Black people are alone in their desire to transform the harshness of society. The oppression of Indigenous people, immigrants, and nonwhite people more generally pervades American society. In profound ways, it is the secret to the conundrum of how the 1 percent can dominate a society where the vast majority has every interest in undoing the existing order. Basic math would seem to indicate that 12 or 13 percent of the population, which is what African Americans constitute, would have no realistic capacity to fundamentally transform the social order of the United States.

The challenge for the movement is transforming the goal of "freedom" into digestible demands that train and organize its forces so that they have the ability to fight for more, the movement must also have a real plan for building and developing solidarity among the oppressed. This means building networks and alliances with Latinos in opposition to attacks on immigrant rights, connecting with Arabs and Muslims campaigning against Islamophobia, and organizing with Native organizations that fight for self-determination within the United States. This is not an exhaustive list; it is only a beginning.

The struggle to build solidarity between oppressed communities, however, is not obvious. For example, when three young Muslims, Deah Barakat, Razan Abu-Salha, and Yusor Abu-Salha, were shot and killed by a white man in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and activists began the hashtag #MuslimLivesMatter, there was a backlash. Some activists described the hashtag as an "appropriation" of the ongoing Black movement:

> This is not at all to undermine or belittle the injustices that other minority groups in this country deal with every day; in fact, it is quite the opposite. Every community deserves to be able to think critically about their own positions in America, about their own challenges, about their own experiences, and in their own terms. Of course Muslim lives are under fire in our American systems. There is no question about that. However, building off the #BlackLivesMatter trend equates struggles that are, though seemingly similar, drastically different.[86]

It is one thing to respect the organizing that has gone into the movement against police violence and brutality, but quite another to conceive of Black oppression and anti-Black racism as so wholly unique that they are beyond the realm of understanding and, potentially, solidarity from others who are oppressed.

In the contest to demonstrate how oppressions differ from one group to the next, we miss how we are connected through oppression—and how those connections should form the basis of solidarity, not a celebration of our lives on the margins. The American government demonizes its enemies to justify mistreating them, whether it is endless war, internment, and torture or mass incarceration and police abuse. There is a racist feedback loop, in which domestic and foreign policies feed and reinforce each other. This is why US foreign policy in the Middle East has reverberated at home. The cynical use of Islamophobia to whip up support for continued American interventions in Arab and Muslim countries inevitably has consequences for Muslim Americans. And the ever-expanding security state, justified by the "War on Terror," becomes the pretext for greater police repression at home—which, of course, disproportionately affects African Americans and Latino/as in border regions.

In the late 1990s, a movement began to stop racial profiling against Black drivers in police stops. Major class-action lawsuits in Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Florida highlighted the extent to which African Americans were subjected to unwarranted suspicion and harassment on the nation's interstates. New Jersey became a center of anti-profiling activism when, in the spring of 1998 during a routine police stop, an officer fired into a van filled with young African American men. Al Sharpton led a protest of several hundred people, including a five-hundred-car motorcade, onto Interstate 95. That same year, the ACLU filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of several Black motorists who complained of racially motivated traffic stops on Interstate 95. The widespread suspicion of Blacks and Latino/as contributed to an atmosphere of intimidation and an implicit threat of violence. (This certainly seemed to be the case with the 1999 murder of Amadou Diallo, which touched off a wave of protests and civil disobedience demanding the prosecution

of the cops involved.) Then, in March 1999, Republican New Jersey governor Christine Todd Whitman fired the state police superintendent when he said profiling was justified because “mostly minorities” trafficked in marijuana and cocaine.[87]

The movement’s momentum however, was dramatically cut short in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11. The US government rushed to turn tragedy into a call for national unity in preparation for a new war with Afghanistan in 2001 and later in Iraq. Moreover, federal agents justified racial profiling to hunt down Muslims and Arabs in the aftermath. No longer was this tactic subject to federal investigation and lawsuits. It became a legitimate and widely supported tool in the War on Terror. For example, in 1999, 59 percent of Americans said they believed that the police engaged in racial profiling; of those, 81 percent thought the practice was wrong.[88] Even George W. Bush, several months before 9/11, addressed a joint congressional session on the practice to declare, “Racial profiling is wrong and we will end it in America.”[89] However, by September 30, 2001, Black support for racial profiling of Arabs had jumped to 60 percent, compared to 45 percent among the general population.[90] Not only was the developing struggle against racism buried under a wave of jingoism and Islamophobic racism, but the focal point of the antiracist struggle, racial profiling, was now being championed as a necessary tool to protect the United States.

When the movement reflects divisions that the American state actively promotes, it makes all of the movements against racism weaker. This does not mean the movements should paper over actual differences among various groups of people, but it does mean there is a need to understand the commonalities and overlaps in oppression while also coming to terms with the reality that there is a lot more to gain by building unity and a lot more to lose by staying in our respective corners.

Conclusion

Protests can expose these conditions and their relationship to the policing state; protests can draw in larger numbers of people; protests can compel public figures to speak against those conditions. Protests can do many things, but protests alone cannot end police

abuse and the conditions that are used to justify it. The movement against police brutality, even in its current inchoate state, has transformed how Americans see and understand policing in the United States. Over the course of a year, Black people from coast to coast have led a struggle to expose the existence of an urban police state with suburban outposts. It has shown the country the depths of the lie that we live in a colorblind or postracial country. Eighty-three percent of Americans say racism "still poses a problem," up 7 percent from 2014. Sixty-one percent of whites and 82 percent of Blacks agree that "there's a need for a conversation about racism in American life."[91] In less than a year, the number of white Americans who view police killings as "isolated incidents" has fallen from 58 percent to 36 percent.[92] At the same time, in July 2015 alone, the police killed an astonishing 118 people, the most that had been killed over the entire year thus far.[93] By mid-August they had killed another fifty-four. On the anniversary of Mike Brown's death, Ferguson police shot and critically injured another Black teenager. In New York City, where there was a vibrant anti-police-brutality movement for years before the most recent iteration of the national movement, liberal mayor Bill DeBlasio has pledged to hire a thousand new police officers. This was surprising, since DeBlasio rode the success of the campaign to end stop-and-frisk into office in 2013. This is only one example of how resilient the police are as an institution, but it also shows elected officials' reluctance to discipline them.

The movement is confronted with many challenges, but it has also shown that it will not go away easily. This has less to do with the organizing genius of organizers than with deep anger among ordinary Blacks who have been beaten, imprisoned, humiliated, and abused, all the while being blamed for their own victimization. The power of ordinary African Americans to push the movement forward was seen in June 2015 in McKinney, Texas, when the police attacked several Black children at a swimming party, including fifteen-year-old Dajerria Becton, who was manhandled by one officer in particular.

In years past, a story like this would have resulted in little if any attention. Instead, a few days later, hundreds of Black and white protestors filled the street of the small suburban development where

the children had been set upon, chanting, “We want to go swimming” and “No swimming, no driving.” It must have been a powerful scene to everyone who witnessed it—and for different reasons. Many of the suburban white neighbors who supported the police were outraged but could do nothing about it; they had been rendered powerless. The police were undoubtedly intimidated by the action, so much so that the most aggressive cop, who had attacked Becton, was forced to resign days later. Most importantly, though, for the Black children who had been abused and threatened at gunpoint by the police and for their parents, to have hundreds of people show up to insist that their lives mattered must have repaired some part of the damage. For them to see the solidarity of hundreds of white people must have given them some hope that not all whites are racist and that some would even stand up and fight alongside them. The demonstration may have also validated their right to resist and stand up to racism and racist violence and affirmed that they were right to protest from the very beginning.

The Black Lives Matter movement, from Ferguson to today, has created a feeling of pride and combativeness among a generation that this country has tried to kill, imprison, and simply disappear. The power of protest has been validated. For it to become more even more effective, to affect the policing state, and to withstand opposition and attempts to infiltrate, subvert, and undermine what has been built, there must be more organization and coordination in the move from protest to movement.

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Chapter Six

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Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor writes on Black politics, social movements, and racial inequality in the United States. Her articles have been published in *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics*, *Culture and Society*, *Jacobin*, *New Politics*, the *Guardian*, *In These Times*, *Black Agenda Report*, *Ms.*, *International Socialist Review*, *Aljazeera America*, and other publications. Taylor is assistant professor in the department of African American Studies at Princeton University.

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